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INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY. VIII.

PART III. GENERAL STRUCTURE OF SOCIETIES.

CHAPTER VII. THE SOCIAL FRONTIERS.

SECTION I. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS.

THIS problem is one of the most important of concrete and abstract social statics. The majority of present sociologists seem not even to have dreamed of it, and yet it obtrudes itself as much as dynamics. Quételet and Comte deserve the credit for having outlined it. Though with the former the static point of view remains too exclusively dominant, he realized in every case that the theory of social statics ought to rest upon the most careful observation of social phenomena. Comte, in his grand generalizations, had the misfortune of not confining himself to this rigorous observation imposed by every positive science.

It is in chap. viii of his *Système de politique positive*, in the second volume devoted entirely to social statics, that Comte formulates his positive theory of the general limits of variation peculiar to the human race. After having stated that, with the exception of astronomy, the variations are at once natural and artificial, he proclaims from the first that it is thus with the human order, collective and individual, which is the most modifiable of all precisely because it is the most complex. It is one of the greatest services rendered by Comte to social science to have put in evidence this proposition destined to revolutionize the ancient philosophy, or rather the social metaphysics, according to which the natural order of societies was recognized as immutable. The whole human wisdom formerly consisted in freeing, in disengaging, the natural order from the obstacles which had been imposed by the civil institutions. But if the social order is more modifiable than any other, either spontaneously or even by the intervention of individuals and societies, does it follow that these variations may be illimitable? Comte

has very clearly answered this in the affirmative, when he said that sociology ought to cease to consist of abstract social statics. Has he solved the problem? We shall judge this by an exposition of his theory.

According to him, each element of the universal order always permits of two sorts of modifications: first, direct—resulting from the spontaneous development of the phenomena which are peculiar to it; secondly, indirect—arising from reactions due to the rest of the natural economy.

From these two sources there may equally arise a third, *i. e.*, modifications arising from *exceptional* variations—inorganic perturbations, maladies among human beings, and revolutions in the collective life. However, according to the principle of Broussais, “these anomalous cases differ from the normal order only in the degree of intensity, without ever offering a really new condition.” This is evident in astronomy and already admitted in geology. The principle ought to be extended to biology and to sociology. Their apparent anomalies, their pathology, are only special cases of the regular and normal order.

The indirect modifications, according to Comte, may arise from variations born (*a*) of the antecedent order, (*b*) of the subsequent order in the great hierarchy of the universal order. But the two extremities of the encyclopædic hierarchy admit of only one source of variations or modifications. It is evident that “if one reduces this immense scale to its three essential degrees, one finds that the material order and the social order can be indirectly modified only by the vital order which separates them and unites them; the latter, on the contrary, undergoes at once the two orders of indirect variations.”

In *Le transformisme social*¹ I have developed and clearly defined these principles in placing them in connection with my classification of social phenomena—a classification without which social statics and dynamics are incomprehensible, except, as Comte has attempted to show, in their most general and vague relations with the antecedents of sociology, either vital or material, according to the restricted order proposed by him. It

¹ Part II, chap. i, pp. 307–34 (Paris: Alcan, 2d ed., 1901).

is precisely for the purpose of filling up the gaps of his static bases that Comte has supposed that the direct modifications of the social state were spontaneous, while they also are the result of actions and reactions which are brought about in the very bosom of the social body by reason of the several modalities of its structure, of its functions, organs, apparatus, and systems. Altogether the statics and dynamics of Comte transgress through too much simplicity, and consequently he ended in the very error that has caused M. de Roberty to say that the classification of social phenomena is impossible, their complexity rendering them indivisible and inseparable. That might be true only in concrete sociology. As to the objection in regard to the complexity, it does not bear examination. For the very reason that the social phenomena are the most modifiable because so complex, they are the most divisible and susceptible of classification. In this, I believe, I have better developed the idea which confuses Comte as well as the most orthodox sociologists of his school. Comte, applying his principles to the human order, adds that there are two necessary modes of the latter—the one collective, the other individual; the first constituting his social existence, the second his moral existence. He happens therefore to make of morality a seventh complementary degree in his encyclopædic scale of sciences: mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology, sociology, and morality. His dualistic conception of the individual and of society compels him, at least logically, to make morality an offshoot of biology. Contrarily to Comte, I think that the social organism embraces at once all of the elements of nature called inorganic and biological, including the human beings. These latter, considered separately, arise exclusively from biology. They are one zoölogical species. Sociologically they form an integral part of the social superorganism, for the reason that every individual of the species *homo* is social, *i. e.*, has no absolutely real and independent existence. To our mind, there is no double morality, one individual and the other collective. The morality of the zoölogical species *homo* would be only a complete adjustment of its organic being in more or less perfect connection with the rest of nature,

but the moment it is a question of morals, as a standard of social conduct, the latter can have for object only the social being in his relations with the entire environment, comprehending that of the other men. Therefore morality is forced into the domain of sociology. It becomes by permanent right individuo-social, without ever being separated from this double character. I have indicated the place of morality in my classification. Its place is naturally found between collective psychology and, notably, collective knowledge, on the one hand, and law on the other. It is less general than the first and less special than the second, which is, however, a natural derivation of it.

Comte, in the pursuit of a subjective social synthesis, came necessarily to end by making morality the beginning of this synthesis. According to him, the inevitable and necessary dualism of the inorganic world and of the sociological world was the greatest possible concentration of philosophy, and consequently unity could be only subjective; and so with morality. We think, on the contrary, that the philosophical synthesis ought to and can be neither subjective nor objective, but total and positive. Universal unity is real. The materials of whatever exists are throughout the same, without, however, all of the simple bodies entering into all of the combinations at the same time, save the most complex organisms, which are precisely the societies in which the elementary combinations alone vary, producing divers textures and structures naturally more numerous than in biology, considering the greater quantity and multiplicity of the materials.

This unitary and positive character of sociology appears in every manifestation, in every social form whatever, small or great, simple or complex, local or universal. In every thing nature enters into intimate communion with man, the latter is not in opposition to it, but is the continuation of it. It forms with man a single body, a single life, a unity, a synthesis of relations, implying and supposing the subject and the object; no longer face to face, as in a duel, but blended. In sociology nature is human and humanity is natural.

Let us remark that Comte, placing, by reason of his synthesis, subjective morality at the top of society, incarnates this

supreme unification in the individual. The classification is: first, inorganic nature; second, biology; third, humanity; fourth, the individual.

He concluded that there were four classes of modifying influences in societies, arising, the first from the environment, the second from life, the third from humanity itself, and the fourth from the individuals. These modifications according to him, are entirely subordinated to the normal state in the same way as movement is to structure. The result is that "*any modifications whatever of the social order are necessarily limited by the 'ensemble' of the fundamental forms of the structure and of the existence of the collective organism.*" The degree of static intensity and of dynamic momentum alone varies. But these are the limits of the variations which Comte's theory announces to us. Is it not entirely to beg the question to say that the degree of static intensity, and of dynamic momentum, alone varies? At bottom, is not the function of laws alone permanent, while its organ changes continually with the structure? Let us take, from the standpoint of static intensity, one of Comte's fundamental laws—the indissolubility of marriage. What do we observe? In Abyssinia and in Hayti there are unions altogether free: an individual is taken and deserted according to fancy. The indissolubility may therefore be represented in those countries as the static intensity of 1. In Morocco the rabbi Jews sanction temporary marriages. The static intensity may there be represented by 50. The indissolubility in Catholic western Europe may be represented by 90, and in the United States, where divorce is permitted, by 75. The fundamental law of Comte, which would be altogether the future ideal, would correspond to 100. Where is the law of structure, *i. e.*, the necessary and constant static? It oscillates from 1 to 100. The only law, under these circumstances, would be that the function of sexual union in the human species requires a certain duration. What is necessary to demonstrate is that the more permanent this duration, the better the exercise of the function is assured by a corresponding organization. But still, at each moment, is not the best organization that which is the most advantageous to this moment? There is

only a tendency toward a stable equilibrium in each of the organs or special apparatus; but the equilibrium may be sought, not in an isolated organ, but in the apparatus of organs, in the systems of apparatus, and especially in the *ensemble* of the structure.

The structure of every special organ is determined, and therefore limited, by the structure of the *ensemble*. At Hayti the conservation of the species and its development were doubtless better assured by free unions than by monogamy. Social statics, especially in its abstract division, ought to, and can therefore, compare only structures in the *ensemble* to other structures in the *ensemble*. As I have set forth in the *Transformisme social*, the standard of civilizations may be estimated for societies compared only from the standpoint of their general organization. This standard is the more stable as it is constituted by an alloy. In a primitive society a less perfect organ, from the absolute point of view, harmonizes better with the function of the *ensemble* than the most perfect organ of an advanced society would do. The real truth of the matter is that *in the advanced societies* the conservation and progress of the species are better assured by a certain permanency of the conjugal bond; but in an elementary society, and especially in a military society, monogamy would have been a cause of enfeeblement, and even of social extinction.

The same is true of what Comte calls the dynamic momentum. A group of Fuegians or Australians recently formed, thanks to certain favorable circumstances, is entirely and almost suddenly destroyed by an epidemic or famine. On the contrary, the Egyptians, Indians, Chinese, and Russians persist throughout the centuries in spite of continued famines and epidemics. The duration of the social life may be represented in the first case by 1, in the second by 50, and above that for the civilizations still better organized. Where is the dynamic law?

The truth is that there are special static and dynamic laws for the different kinds of societies and for their several organs and functions. But above these historic laws there are some few constant general and abstract laws, yet imperfectly recognized, constituting the problem which abstract sociology is to evolve

from the preliminary study of the elements and of particular organs and structures. In any case, statics, either concrete or abstract, applies only to the structures in the *ensemble*. It considers only the relations and connections, the solidarity of the different elements and organs in space and time.

Up to the present, under color of general and abstract laws, sociology has hardly furnished us anything but laws relating to particular organs and to particular societies. It has remained, in short, descriptive. This was the proper method, especially when, in place of considering only the great lines, it condescended to confine itself to relying from the first upon statistics, and then upon the minute observation of all of the special organizations. Sociologists may be reproached only for not having followed this method with sufficient thoroughness, and for having sacrificed it too much in these latter times to theses rather literary and brilliant than scientific and solid. There are varieties of societies as there are varieties of plants and animals. The great difference is (but it remains yet to be demonstrated) that the social varieties may be traced back to a single species, whose forms alone are varied, notwithstanding their common type of structure.

The social species have their peculiar organizations and forms, and especially their common functions. General and abstract sociology has precisely for object to disentangle these forms and these functions. Quételet had very forcibly shown that in determining averages it was necessary to consider exclusively elements of the same order. In like manner, abstract social statics may be evolved only from the comparative study of particular societies, and not alone from the mere comparison of their several special organs.

Certainly, as Comte says, modifications of the social order are limited by the fundamental laws of structure, but Comte did not in reality indicate to us the limits of these modifications, except in a fashion too general and too vague for the categories. He has not succeeded in this, and could not succeed, because his method was insufficient. It had not for basis a sufficient analysis and description of the social elements and tissues. This

analysis and this description can be furnished only by statistics, and especially by economic statistics. From these alone can we advance to the study of the functions and organs, the apparatus and systems, and later to the study of the societies considered in their *ensemble*—at first from the concrete and descriptive standpoint, and finally from the abstract and qualitative.

Having indicated the four classes of possible modifying influences on societies, Comte, entering into their details, sets forth how they operate.

1. Influence of the modifications of the inorganic environment: (*a*) through the common longevity or interval between generations—the dead governing the living; (*b*) through the diminution of the population; (*c*) through the more or less rapid multiplication of the population.

2. Influence of modifications of the biological environment, through the races. This influence is obscure and is badly elucidated. According to him, it is sometimes confounded with that exercised by the different physiques arising from the differences of the inorganic environment and transmitted by heredity. He seeks to explain by the races that which he formerly explained by climates. At all events, this influence is weakened more and more by the continued mixture of races.

3. Influence of the direct modifications of society, resulting spontaneously from its own play. Comte understood by this the modifications exercised by societies upon each other. They result from the concrete multiplicity of the social centers, although in abstract sociology there may be only one people. Even without conquest, these modifications would have arisen spontaneously sooner or later, "with only slight variations." Yet he adds that this action may become systematic, so as to abridge and diminish the transitions.

These considerations are, indeed, very important and very sound, but in placing itself from the very first in the abstract point of view of a single humanity, the spontaneity of the development becomes incomprehensible, unless we adopt as the point of departure the constant multiplicity of the social factors of which I have proposed a hierarchical classification, and whose

reciprocal actions alone follow and succeed the existence of the always correlative structural forms.

4. Influence of the sociological modifications, arising from the individual order. This is, according to Comte, the most peculiar among the modifications. It acts in an inverse sense to the more general modifying factors. The case of Napoleon and Frederic prove that the action of the most powerful statesmen is generally restricted in its limits to one generation. In progressive societies, which develop into solidarity and into continuity, the individual perturbations are less and less influential. The action of Bonaparte was less so than that of Charlemagne, that of Charlemagne less so than that of Cæsar.

The point seems to me debatable, but the essential error is in perpetuating in sociology this dualism between the individual and society. Cæsar, Charlemagne, Frederic, and Napoleon were in reality only social instruments, notwithstanding their great individuality, and, thanks to it, they even represented the social forces acting through their intervention. In my theory, the individuals, with the physical environment, are the constitutive factors of societies. Once socialized, their action is no longer exclusively physical or individual. They become composite social organs—organs which may be incarnated in certain individuals; and under these circumstances the individuals act, not as social perturbations, but as social agents. They conserve this character in so far as their function corresponds to certain correlative social conditions. They lose this representative character when the function tends to be replaced and to assume other, less individualistic forms. In reality, nothing is less individual and absolute than, for example, czarism. The influence becomes perturbative only at a certain moment, when the organ ceases to respond to its function, when the latter demands an organization still more social than this apparently individual form. From this standpoint, it is necessary, at least, to distinguish, in the work of *great men*, that which constitutes the individual innovation and the historic and transitory form, from the collective force. The very limited individual element extends its influence, at most, to one or to several generations, but the

collective work of which the *hero* is the manifestation may be enormous and durable. It is necessary to make this distinction for Cæsar, Charlemagne, Frederic, Napoleon, Bismarck, etc., and also for all inventors and innovators in all branches of human activity. For instance, the work of Fourier, and of St. Simon is enormously social and durable, notwithstanding certain individual disadvantages of these great geniuses. These men are in reality only great in so far as they are representatives of the collective genius. Their individual aberrations, outside of their positive social function, are the ephemeral residues, which in certain cases confine themselves to folly. But would we not be able to maintain that even these excessive oscillations of their genius are not entirely attributable to their individuality, and that, like free-will in general, they ought also to be explained socially, and to be considered only as *relatively individual* through connection with the social influences properly speaking?

The supposed individual aberrations may in every case be ignored by abstract sociology. They are interesting only in their connection with psychiatry, in so far as the latter is related to social pathology. They may, however, themselves have their source in the appearance of certain social needs whose non-satisfaction may partly, or even entirely, throw out of equilibrium some individual brains.

These reservations are necessary in order to clearly mark the difference between my sociological monism, which rejects equally the conception of society in so far as distinct from its environment, and of the individual in so far as distinct from society, and the dualistic doctrine of Comte. The latter very forcibly says:

Statesmen commonly believe that the revolutionary situations are radically removed from the normal laws. However, these perturbations, as in any other case, are always kept within the limits of the simple static and dynamic degree.

Comte should have been able to conclude that the revolutionary situations, as well as the work of statesmen, are not always and necessarily perturbations; that they are so only in their negative and altogether accessory aspect, and that they may be entirely ignored.

But Comte is mistaken, or rather humanity would be mistaken in its evolution, when he expresses the view, which is in contradiction with his own conception of the moral order, that

whoever will adopt the conception established in this volume concerning the structure and existence of the collective organism, will at once recognize that the modern anarchy constitutes but the last degree of an *immense perturbation*. Its real origin is, indeed, traced back to the first dissolution of the ancient theocracies, the only complete types that the social order then permitted. We see from that time always and everywhere arising the revolutionary principle of the election of superiors by the inferiors which developed gradually during thirty centuries and now menaces the overthrow of political society.

What would one say of a zoölogist who, meeting in his observations an animal species, of an importance equal to that of human societies which occupy with their existence the thirty centuries of history of which Comte speaks, and who should reject this species as a perturbation of his organic classification, for the reason that it deranges his preconceived order? It is not the thirty centuries that ought to be erased from history as purely censurable or negative, but it is sociology that ought to conform its conclusions to the historical evolution. This evolution, so considerable in time and space, which Comte considers as abnormal and perturbative, is, on the contrary, an organic and normal development. What is true is that the progressive transformation of *public authorities* into *public servants*, and of the *hierarchy* into an *equivalence* which is the very law of political progress, is in manifest contradiction to the hierarchies and authoritative conception of Comte—a conception not at all positive, but simply subjective, as he recognized it himself.

It is even not correct, as he thought, that "the modifying social factors become less and less intense;" except that the more the organization is developed, the less easy becomes any profound social rearrangements of the most anciently integrated. It is this that explains why regularity becomes greater and greater, notwithstanding the growing mass of new and accessory variations destined to be consolidated and to support the weight of future modifications. The thesis of Comte is in contradiction to his own observation that the most complex phenomena are the most modifiable of all. He implicitly avows the error of his

authoritative point of view when he remarks, very correctly, that the word "order" has a double signification—"government" and "arrangement"—and that the first serves only as the initiation of the second.

I do not insist upon the conclusion of Comte's social statics, except in order to note the subjective idealism. We shall have occasion to recur to these several static theories relating to the family, language, property, government, etc. He ends his study concerning the *positive theory of the general limits of variations peculiar to the human order*—a title so full of promise—by proclaiming the final and subjective preponderance of the *Great Being Humanity* over the objective influence, *i. e.*, over the material, affinitive or feminine and intellectual. "Death, the necessary consequence of life, ends by becoming the principal source of its systematization." The subjective influence of death in virtue of its irrevocability ends by surmounting everything, and

nothing better can confirm this precious conclusion than its special application to the institution of language, which is more social than anything else, and on that account better fitted to embody all of our personal attributes. Under the growing weight of the subjective impulsions the human tongue tends without ceasing toward its complete final systematization in proportion as our solidarity and continuity are developed across the objective variations produced by climates, races, nationalities, or individualities. This necessary unity, at once consequence and condition of religious universality, renders everywhere systematic the effective submission of each to the always sacred preponderance of the Great Being to whom we unconsciously submit the regular ascendancy.

Why unconsciously, seeing that Comte is aware of this influence and informs us of it? Indeed, all that is very poetic, but sociology does not have to make a choice between objectivism and subjectivism. Its unitary systematization, fully and exclusively positive, suffices of itself: it embraces the subject and the object, man and his environment, in a single organic whole, which is society. Of Comte's grandiose conception of a Great Being *Humanity* there remains in reality the fundamental law of solidarity in space and of continuity in time, of which variability is a constant and necessary element. This law by itself sufficiently explains the connection of all of the spontaneous and successive

social relations, as well as the increasing influence over the present by the past, which continually incorporates everything that is really assimilable and valuable. No, the dead do not govern the living, but the living succeed the dead. It is living humanity that governs itself, equipped with the heritage of the past, but which heritage is accepted under obligations which do not exceed the bequest. The heritage is especially modifiable in its highest acquisitions, and is the more modifiable as it is the more complex. Thus life always triumphs over death in the eternal course toward progress, and tradition itself exerts its influence only through the instrumentality of its living depositories, and though the modifications which the depositories make it submit to. Life is a continued adaptation. The final and absolute systematization of life would be death.

The statics of Comte, as also his dynamics, are more than premature syntheses. They still belong to the kind of *philosophy of history* in full efflorescence in the nineteenth century, but which, however, constituted the bond of union between the old Scholastics and the real positive social science, whose object today is, above everything else, to perfect the methods. Though not concealing my own theoretical conceptions, which I have thus far *reached*, but not *perfected*, I present them only as attempts and researches in a path the access to which, I realize, would have been impossible without the labors of the immortal thinkers whom I have criticised.

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[*To be continued.*]